



**Date:** November 22, 2011

**To:** Thomas J. Bonfield, City Manager  
**Through:** Theodore L. Voorhees, Deputy City Manager  
**From:** Mark D. Ahrendsen, Transportation Director  
Andy Henry, Transportation Planner  
**Subject:** Presentation on Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) for Durham-Orange and Durham-Wake Rail Transit Corridor

### **Executive Summary**

This briefing is to update the City Council on ongoing planning efforts concerning regional transit. The Triangle Transit Authority (TTA) has conducted an Alternatives Analysis of two regional rail corridors that are in Durham City and County. The light rail transit corridor extends from UNC-Chapel Hill to Duke University and downtown Durham and to Alston Avenue. The commuter rail corridor is located in the North Carolina Railroad corridor and extends from west Durham (near Fulton Street) through downtown Durham and RTP to the Durham/Wake county line and beyond through Morrisville, Cary, Raleigh to near the Wake/Johnston County line. The Alternatives Analysis provides the cost, ridership, environmental and public input data for these rail services. Based on this Analysis, the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization (DCHC MPO) must identify the alignment, station endpoints and technology for a Locally Preferred Alternative that is needed to submit a federal funding application. Durham has two representatives on the DCHC MPO policy board, the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC).

In June 2011, the DCHC MPO, the TTA and the Durham Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) approved the Durham County Bus and Rail Investment Plan, and the BOCC authorized a county referendum for a county-wide ½ cent sales tax for transit. On November 8<sup>th</sup>, voters approved the transit tax referendum.

The briefing will cover the Alternatives Analysis for the two railroad corridors in Durham, the recommended Locally Preferred Alternative, and the near term schedule of these planning efforts. City Council will be asked to provide their comments and input.

### **Recommendation**

Receive the staff presentation and provide comments.

## **Background**

Several years ago, the Triangle region was notified that the proposed regional rail project would not qualify for federal New Start funding. This action motivated the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization (DCHC MPO) and the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO) to appoint a regional commission to study transit, called the Special Transit Advisory Commission (STAC), which submitted its recommendations to the regions two MPOs in May 2008. The recommendations included rail transit extending from Raleigh to Durham to Chapel Hill, and bus transit investments to expand service coverage and quality. In 2009, the DCHC MPO incorporated the STAC recommendations into the 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan (2035 LRTP). The Congestion Relief/Intermodal Transport bill was approved in August 2009, enabling local areas to fund public transportation using an increase in the sales tax, car registration fees and special district property taxes, and requiring a Transit Plan to guide the use of such funding.

The Triangle Transit Authority (TTA) has implemented the Triangle Regional Transit Program (TRTP) to study the financial, ridership, environmental and public input aspects of regional bus and rail investments. In 2010, the TRTP held a series of workshops throughout the Triangle region to gather public input on a regional transit vision, and subsequently studied six light rail corridors in Durham County and twelve corridors in Wake County. This screening process identified the top rail corridors in terms of performance and these corridors were studied in an Alternatives Analysis that provided cost and ridership data as well as alignment and station alternatives. Two selected corridors are in Durham County:

- Light rail corridor that extends from UNC-Chapel Hill to Duke University and downtown Durham and to Alston Avenue; and,
- Commuter rail corridor that extends from west Durham (near Fulton Street) through downtown Durham and the RTP and through Wake County to near the Johnston County line.

The DCHC MPO plans to discuss and approve, most likely at their January and February 2012 meetings, a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) for the light rail corridor between Chapel Hill and Durham and the commuter rail corridor that extends from West Durham to the Durham/Wake County line (and beyond to the Wake/Johnston County line). The Federal Transit Administration requires the MPO to adopt an LPA, which identifies the alignment, termini (endpoints) and technology for a proposed rail system, as a requirement to apply for federal New Starts funding. Triangle Transit will need an adopted LPA by February 2012 to meet the August 2012 deadline for New Starts applications in this fiscal year.

In June 2011, the DCHC MPO, the TTA and the Durham Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) approved the Durham County Bus and Rail Investment Plan, and subsequently, the BOCC authorized a county referendum for a county-wide ½ cent sales tax for transit. The Investment Plan proposed improvements to local and regional bus service that are coordinated with the financial and service expectations of the light rail and commuter rail corridors. These actions and the Investment Plan were required by the Congestion Relief/Intermodal Transport bill. On November 8<sup>th</sup>, voters approved the transit tax referendum.

**Issues/Analysis**

Durham City Council action is not required on the LPA. However, City Council has an interest in these issues since a significant portion of both the light rail corridor and the commuter rail corridor is located in the City of Durham. More specifically, the LPA will make recommendations on routing and station locations in the City that will have significant impacts on land use development and the transportation network. In addition, the DCHC MPO will need to approve the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) for each corridor, and the City of Durham has two representatives on the DCHC MPO policy board, the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC).

**Alternatives**

1. Receive Presentation and offer comments.
2. Receive Presentation but defer comments to a later date.

**Financial Analysis**

This agenda item does not have an immediate impact on the City budget. However, if implemented, the regional and local transit plans will have a significant financial impact on the City budget and City of Durham citizens.

**SDBE Summary**

This item does not require review by the Office of Equal Opportunity /Equity Assurance.

**Attachments**

- Attachment A: Triangle Regional Transit Program.